

Miriam, Aaron & Moses: Death, Mourning, Consequences & Legacy
LSS Haskamah Minyan Parsha Class
Parsha Chukath – July 13, 2019
In memory of Golda Seva Rosen, Zehava bat Mordechai v' Miriam on her 19th Yahrzeit

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־הָעֵדָה מִדְּבָר־צִן בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֶׁב הָעָם בְּקֶדֶשׁ וַתָּמָת
שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֶר שָׁם:

Numbers 20:1

Old JTS	And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.
New JTS	The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there.
Artscroll	The Children of Israel, the whole assembly, arrived at the Wilderness of Zin in the first month and the people settled in Kadesh. Miriam died there and she was buried there.
Kaplan	In the first month, the entire Israelite community came to the Tzin Desert, and the people stopped in Kadesh. It was there that Miriam died and was buried.
Alter	And the Israelites, the whole community, came to the Wilderness of Zin, in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and she was buried there.

וַיִּפָּשֵׁט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבָּשׁ אֹתָם אֶת־אַלְעָזָר בֶּנוֹ וַיֵּמָת אֶהֱרֹן
שָׁם בְּרֹאשׁ הָהָר וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה וְאַלְעָזָר מִן־הָהָר:

Numbers 20:22-29

וַיֵּרְאוּ כָל־הָעֵדָה כִּי גֹעַ אֶהֱרֹן וַיִּבְכּוּ אֶת־אַהֲרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Old JTS	And they journeyed from Kadesh; and the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came unto mount Hor. And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Aaron shall be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the waters of Meribah. ... And Aaron died there in the top of the mount; and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead , they wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.
New JTS	Setting out from Kadesh, the Israelites arrived in a body at Mount Hor. At Mount Hor, on the boundary of the land of Edom, the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Let Aaron be gathered to his kin. he is not to enter the land that I have assigned to the Israelite people, because you disobeyed my command about the waters of Meribah. ... And Aaron died there on the summit of the mountain. When Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, the whole community knew that Aaron had breathed his last. All the house of Israel bewailed Aaron for thirty days.
Artscroll	They journeyed from Kadesh and the Children of Israel arrived – the entire assembly – at Mount Hor. Hashem said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the Land that I have given to the Children of Israel, because you defied My word at the waters of strife. ... Then Aaron died there on the top of the mountain, and Moses and Eleazar descended from the mountain. When the entire Assembly saw that Aaron had perished , they wept for Aaron thirty days, the entire House of Israel.
Kaplan	Moving on from Kadesh, the entire Israelite community came to Hor Mountain. At Hor Mountain, God said to Moses and Aaron, "Aaron will [now died and] be gathered up to his people. He will not come to the land that I am giving the Israelites because you rebelled against My word at the Waters of Dispute. ... Aaron died there on the top of the mountain, the people realized that Aaron had died. The entire family of Israel mourned Aaron for thirty days.
Alter	And they journeyed on from Kadesh, and Israelites, all the community came to Hor the mountain. And the Lord said to Moses, and to Aaron at Hor the mountain on the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Let Aaron be gathered to his kin, for he shall not come into the land that I have given to the Israelites because you both have rebelled against My word at the Waters of Meribah. ... Aaron died there on the mountaintop, and Moses came down, and Eleazar with him, from the mountain. And all the community saw that Aaron had expired , and all the house of Israel keened for Aaron thirty days.

ויעל אהרן הכהן אל־הר ההר על־פי God וימת שם בשנת הארבעים לצאת
בני־ישראל מארץ מצרים בתוך השמישי באחד לחדש:

Numbers 33:38

Old JTS	And Aaron the priest went up into mount Hor at the commandment of the Lord , and died there, in the fortieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month.
New JTS	Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor at the command of the Lord and died there, in the fortieth year after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month.
Artscroll	Then Aaron the Kohen went up to Mount Hor at the word of Hashem and died there, in the fortieth year after the Children of Israel went forth from the land of Edgpt, in the fifth month on the first of the month
Kaplan	Aaron the priest climbed Hor Mountain at G-d's command , and he died there on the first day of the fifth month, in the 40 th year of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. .
Alter	And Aaron the priest went up Hor the Mountain by the Lord's word and died there in the fortieth year of the Israelites' going out from Egypt, in the fifth month on the first of the month.

וימת שם משה עבד God בארץ מואב על־פי God
ויקבר אתו בגל בארץ מואב מול בית פעור ולא־יגדע איש את־קברתו עד היום הזה:
ומשה בן־מאה ועשרים שנה במתו לא־כהתה עינו ולא־גס לחה:
ויבכו בני ישראל את־משה בערבית מואב שלשים יום ויתמו ימי בכי אבל משה:

Deuteronomy 34:5-8

Old JTS	So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord . And he was buried in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth-peor; and no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day. And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; so the days of weeping in the mourning for Moses were ended.
New JTS	So Moses the servant of the Lord died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the Lord . He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, near Beth-peor and no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated. And the Israelites bewailed Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days. The period of wailing and mourning for Moses came to an end.
Artscroll	So Moses, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moab, by the mouth of Hashem . He buried him in the depression, in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished. The Children of Israel bewailed Moes in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the days of tearful mourning for Moses ended.
Kaplan	It was there in the land of Moab that God's servant Moses died at God's word . [God] buried him in the depression in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor. No man knows the place that he was buried, even to this day. Moses was 120 years old when he died, but his eyes had not dimmed, and his natural powers had not left him. The Israelites mourned Moses in the west plains of Moab for thirty days. The wailing period of Moses' mourning came to an end.
Alter	And Moses, the Lord's servant, died there in the land of Moab by the word of the Lord . And he was buried in the glen in the land of Moab opposite Beth-Peor, and no man has known his burial place to this day. And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eye had not grown bleary, and his sap had not fled. And the Israelites keened for Moses in the steppes of Moab thirty days, and the days of keening in mourning for Moses came to an end.

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- Thank you to Ephrem Wagner for his months as my chavrusa and assistance in preparing for this shiur.
- Rabbi Moshe Sokolow for his teaching all of us Parshah Hashavua for decades in the Hashkama Minyan group.
- Rabbi Chaim Brovender for helping start me down the path of learning and for teaching Parshah Hashavua remotely for decades.

Moed Katan 28a

Another teaching about the death of Miriam:

למה נקמקה מיתת מרים לפרשת פרה – אמר רבי אמי – R' Ami said:

אדומה – Why is the death of Miriam juxtaposed to the passage about the *parah adumah*?^[7] לומר לך – This serves to tell you that מה פרה אדומה מכפרת – just as the *parah adumah* provides atonement,^[8] אף מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת – so do the deaths of the righteous provide atonement.^[9]

A similar teaching:

למה נקמקה מיתת אהרן לבגדי – אמר רבי אלעזר – R' Elazar said: למה נקמקה מיתת אהרן לבגדי – Why is the death of Aaron juxtaposed to a mention of the Kohanic vestments?^[10] This tells you that מה בגדי כהונה מכפרין – just as the Kohanic vestments provide atonement,^[11] אף מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת – so do the deaths of the righteous provide atonement.^[12]

Abarbanel

Aaron died there. Since the deaths of Moses and Aaron were decreed simultaneously, why did they die at separate times? First God wished the three siblings to die in the same order that they were born, as they would naturally do; second, Aaron's sin with the Golden Calf preceded Moses' sin with the spies; third, each of them deserved to be mourned 1,000 times – it would be wrong for a single period of mourning to serve for them both.

Chizkuni

ותמה שם מרים, "Miriam died there;" seeing that the dying of the people condemned to die as a result of their acceptance of the spies' majority report had commenced there, Miriam's death as well as Aaron's, is also reported at this juncture.

Hirsch

There Miriam died, and there she was buried. "She had completed her mission on earth. Her grave in Kadesh could tell future generations that she did not leave this world until the new young generation stood ready to enter the Promised Land."

Samson Raphael Hirsch, Isaac Levy translation into English, Pentateuch, Numbers, 2nd edition, Vol.

Ramban on Numbers 20:1

Sin of Aaron & Moses

The sin of Moses and Aaron in the [matter of the] waters of Meribah is not clearly expressed in Scripture. Rashi explains that [their sin consisted of hitting the rock] ...

These words are [in the nature of] a homiletic interpretation, but they do not clarify [the matter].

Now Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra has already refuted many claims of the commentators in [their explanations of the nature of] this sin. But the secret to which he alluded is also incorrect ...

Now Rabbeinu Rabbi Moshe [ben Maimon] advanced the following reasoning, and explained “that the sin of Moses ... consisted of tending towards anger ...

Thus, we have solved one of the most difficult problems in the Torah, concerning which many things have been said, and which has been asked many times, namely: what was the sin which Moses committed? Consider what has been said [by others] about it, and what we ourselves have explained, and let the truth prevail.”

The most likely explanation amongst all those that have been said about this matter, and the one best suited to answer a questioner, is that of Rabbeinu Chananel, who wrote [in his commentary] that the sin consisted of their saying, “are we to bring forth water out of the rock? They should [not have said are we, but] shall the Eternal bring you forth water? ...

The Truth [Cabalistic explanation] is that this subject [i.e., the nature of Moses' sin in the incident of the waters of Meribah] is one of the great secrets amongst the mysteries of the Torah.

Ramban (Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah, Numbers. Translated & annotated by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel.

Siftei Chachamim on Rashi

Just as sacrifices bring atonement. You might ask: Was the red cow a sacrifice? Surely they did not offer any part of it [on the altar]! The answer is based on Rashi's alternative interpretation above (19:9), that the Torah calls it a sin-offering in order to say that it is like the holy sacrifices in that it is forbidden for one to personally benefit from it. From there we learn that it is like a sacrifice.

So do the death of the righteous... You might ask: According to this, shouldn't the Torah have juxtaposed her death to the sacrifices themselves? The answer is that it is juxtaposed to the red cow because they are similar. The deaths of the righteous are not sacrifices, and the red cow is also not a sacrifice per se. Thus we learn one from the other, just as this one brings atonement, so too that one brings atonement.

Moed Katan 28a

Another teaching by R' Elazar about the death of Miriam:

— אף מרים בגשיקה מתה — **And R' Elazar said:** — **Miriam also died through a “kiss” from God.**^[4] “שם” — This emerges from an analogy between the word *there* written in connection with the death of Miriam, and the word *there* written in reference to the death of Moses.^[5] ומפני — **And why is the phrase, by the mouth of Hashem, not stated explicitly in connection with [Miriam]?^[6]** — מפני שגנאי הדבר לאומרו — **Because it would be indelicate to say such a thing.**

Bava Batra 17a

The Gemara asks: But with regard to Miriam it is not written: “By the mouth of the Lord.” Rabbi Elazar says: Miriam also died with a kiss, as this is learned through a verbal analogy between the word “there” mentioned in regard to Miriam: “And Miriam died there” (Numbers 20:1), and the word “there” mentioned in regard to Moses: “And Moses died there” (Deuteronomy 34:5). And for what reason is “by the mouth of the Lord” not stated with regard to her? It is unseemly to mention death by a kiss with regard to a woman.

Rashi

ומפני שמימי — MIRIAM DIED THERE. — אף היא בנשיקה מתה — She, too, died through a kiss.⁶
שאינו — So why did it not say of her “she died by the mouth of HASHEM”?⁷
על פי ה' — For it is not a respectful manner of speaking with regard to Him Who is on High.⁸

Or HaChaim

ותמת שם וגו' — *MIRIAM DIED THERE, ETC.*

The verse could have simply said that “Miriam died,” and we would know from the context that she died in Kadesh. Or HaChaim wonders why the verse emphasizes that she died “there”:

ורבותינו — צריך לדעת טעם אומרו “שם” — We need to understand why [the verse] says the word *there*.
— וילך רשנו שלא עכבוה — Now, our Sages, of blessed memory (*Moed Katan* 28a), infer from our verse that

וירשהו — they did not delay [Miriam’s] burial; rather, they buried her immediately after her death.
— נשמעת מאומרו “ותקבר שם” — However, this teaching is derived from [the verse’s] subsequent statement, *and she was buried “there,”* which implies that they buried her on the spot, without any delay. But we still need to understand the verse’s first mention of *there*.

Or HaChaim explains:

— ונראה כי לצד שהזכיר מיתה — It seems correct to answer that since [the verse] mentions the death of Miriam,
— חש על כבוד הצדקה — [the Torah] was concerned about this slight to the honor of the righteous woman,
— שהרי אמרו צדיקים במיתתם קרויים חיים — for [our Sages] say (*Berachos* 18a): The righteous, even when they are dead, are called “living.” Thus, the verse’s statement that Miriam “died” might be taken to imply that she was not righteous.
— לזה דקדק לומר “שם” — Therefore, [the verse] was careful to say, *Miriam died there*;
— פירוש שם הוא שמתה ולא נשארה ביניהם — meaning, it was only “there” that she died, and did not remain among [the people] in the encampment,
— אלא — but she remains alive elsewhere, among the righteous in Gan Eden.
Or HaChaim elaborates: — כי הצדיקים דומים לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא למרגליות המונחים בארגז — Because in this world, the righteous are before the Holy One, blessed is He, like precious pearls placed in a chest.
— כשהוא חפץ באחת מהם הוא מוציאה מהארגז וקובעה בתכשיט אחר מתכשיטיו — When He desires the presence of one of them, He removes it from the chest of this world and sets it in one of His “ornaments” in Heaven. The person is no less alive than before; what has changed is only his or her location before Hashem.^[8]

Or HaChaim now cites the Sages' exposition of the phrase *Miriam died "there"*:

לְגִיּוֹרָה שָׁנָה — But our Sages, of blessed memory, explain (*Moed Katan* 28a) the phrase, *[Miriam] died there*, as teaching a *gezeirah shavah* between her death and that of Moshe. The word *there* appears concerning both deaths,^[9] לֵאמֹר שָׁנָם הִיא מָתָה בְּנִשְׁקָה — to tell us that *[Miriam] too*, like Moshe, died by a “kiss” from Hashem.^[10] וְשִׁבְעִים פָּנִים לַתּוֹרָה — And both interpretations are true, for there are seventy approaches to the Torah.

Siftei Chachamim on Rashi

By the Divine kiss. Since it is written here שָׁם ["there"], and concerning Aharon it is also written “Aharon died שָׁם ["there"].” Because if it were not for the *gezeirah shavah* [Scriptural comparison] why does the Torah write “שָׁם” ["there"] twice regarding Miriam. Perforce it was for the *gezeirah shavah*, to teach that just as there [Aharon died] by the Divine kiss, as it is written, “By the mouth of Hashem,” so too here it was by the Divine kiss.

Why then is it not said concerning her, “By the mouth of Hashem.” There are those who ask: What was Rashi's difficulty? Didn't he explain that we learn a *gezeirah shavah* from Aharon through the word שָׁם ["there"]? The answer is that Rashi is asking: Why is the *gezeirah shavah* necessary? Let the Torah write, “By the mouth of Hashem” explicitly. For we are forced to say that it is not a full *gezeirah shavah*, because if it is, why is it necessary to write “By the mouth of Hashem” regarding Aharon in order to teach that he died by the Divine kiss? We could have learned the *gezeirah shavah* with the word “there” from Moshe. Rather it is certain that this is not a full *gezeirah shavah* and therefore the Torah writes “By the mouth of Hashem” regarding Aharon. Consequently it should have also written “By the mouth of Hashem” for Miriam. Nonetheless, the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 28a) explicitly states that we learn the *gezeirah shavah* from Moshe. Accordingly one must say that Rashi is saying as follows: “She too died by the Divine kiss” meaning that one learns a *gezeirah shavah* from the word “there” [stated] regarding Moshe. However, regarding Aharon it says, “By the mouth of Hashem,” thus it is not necessary to learn this from Moshe. This was why Rashi says וּבְאֵהָרֵן ["However, concerning Aharon"] rather than שֶׁבְּאֵהָרֵן ["That was [said] about Aharon"].

Rashi

ב, אלה מסעי – “by the mouth of HASHEM” is stated – נאמר, על פי ה' – And of Aaron – ובאהרן – in the Torah portion which begins “*Eilah Masei*.”¹

Rashi on Moses's death – Deuteronomy 34:5

□ על פי ה' – BY THE MOUTH OF HASHEM. This means, בנשיקה⁸ – through a kiss.⁸

Midrash Rabbah Chukas 19:20

§20 ויראו כל העדה כי גוע אהרן – *THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY SAW THAT AARON HAD PERISHED.*

The Midrash expounds how the Israelites saw with their own eyes that Aaron had died, since they themselves did not ascend the mountain to witness his death:^[305]

כיון שירדו משה ואלעזר מן ההר – When Moses and Elazar

descended from the mountain, נתקבצו כל הקהל עליהם – the entire assembly gathered around them ויאמרו להם: היכן אהרן – and asked them, “Where is Aaron?” They אמרו להם: מת – They replied to them, “He died.” אמרו: היאך מלאך המות יכול לפגוע – [The people] said to them, “How was it possible for the Angel of Death to strike him dead? אדם שעמד במלאך המות – Why, Aaron is the person who confronted the Angel of Death and stopped him from killing others,” דכתיב “ויעמד בין” – as it is written, *He (Aaron) stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked* (above, 17:13). “Surely, then, he can defend himself against the Angel of Death! Therefore, if you bring [Aaron] back to us, then fine; אם לא נסקל אתכם – but if not, we will stone both of you!”^[306] באותה שעה עמד משה בתפלה – At that time, Moses stood in prayer before God, ואמר: רבונו של עולם, הוציאנו – and said, “Master of the Universe! Remove us from suspicion!” מיד פתח הקדוש ברוך הוא את המערה והראהו להם – Immediately, the Holy One, blessed is He, opened the cave in which Aaron was buried, and showed him to [the Israelites], ויאמרו “ויראו כל העדה כי גוע אהרן” – as it is stated, *The entire assembly saw that Aaron had perished*, indicating that they saw with their own eyes.^[307]

Rashi

29. ויראו כל העדה – THE ENTIRE ASSEMBLY SAW. כשראו משה ואֵלֶּזָר יורדים – When they saw Moses and Elazar descending, וְאַהֲרֹן לֹא יָרַד – and Aaron did not descend, אָמְרוּ – they said, הֵיכֵן הוּא – “Where is Aaron?” אָמַר לָהֶם – [Moses] said to them, מֵת – “He is dead.” אָמְרוּ – They said, אִם־אֶפְשָׁר – “Is it possible – מי שֶׁעָמַד בְּנֶגְדַּת מַלְאָךְ הַמָּוֶת – that he who stood opposite the Angel of Death – וְעָצַר אֶת הַמִּגָּפָה – and stopped the plague,² וְשָׁלוּט בּוֹ מִלֹּאף הַמָּוֶת – could fall under the domination of the Angel of Death?” מִיד בִּקֵּשׁ מֹשֶׁה רַחֲמִים – Moses immediately sought mercy, i.e., prayed, וְהַרְאוּהוּ מַלְאָכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת לָהֶם – and the ministering angels showed [Aaron] to them, מָטָל בַּמֶּטָּה – placed on the bed. רָאוּ וְהֵאֱמִינוּ³ – They saw, and they believed.³

□ כִּי גִנֵּעַ – THAT [AARON] HAD PERISHED. אֹמֵר אֲנִי – I say “שֶׁהִמָּתְרַגַּם,, דָּהָא מֵיִת” – whoever has *Targum Onkelos* rendering this as “because [Aaron] died” is in error, אֶלֶּא אִם בֵּן – unless he has *Targum Onkelos* render the word וִירָאוּ as “they appeared,” i.e., they became exposed. שְׁלֹא אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ וְזִכְרוֹנָם לְבִרְכָּה – For our Rabbis of blessed memory did not say “בִּי,, זֶה מִשְׁמַשׁ בְּלִשׁוֹן,, דָּהָא” – that this instance of the word כִּי serves in the sense of דָּהָא, “because,” אֶלֶּא עַל מִדְּרָשׁ – except with respect to the midrashic interpretation, that

RASHI ELUCIDATED

the verse means שְׁנִסְתַּלְקוּ עֲנָנֵי כְבוֹד – that the Clouds of Glory departed after Aaron’s death, – do not read the verse as saying “[the entire assembly] saw,”¹ i.e., and as R’ Abahu said, “וִירָאוּ,, וְכִדְאָמַר רַבִּי אֲבָהוּ – but rather, “[the entire assembly] was seen,”¹ אֶלֶּא,, וִירָאוּ” – exposed, rendered vulnerable.² – To this vocalization of וִירָאוּ, “because,” applies, לָמָּה שְׁלִמְעָלָה – for it gives a reason – לָפִי שֶׁהָיָא נְתִיבַת טַעַם – why “were they seen”? – לָפִי שֶׁהָרִי מֵת – why “were they seen”? – לָמָּה וִירָאוּ – for that which precedes it, as follows: – But regarding the version of *Targum Onkelos* which renders our verse as “the entire assembly saw,” נֹפֵל – דָּהָא,, נֹפֵל – but rather the sense of the word כִּי as “because” does not apply, אֶלֶּא לִשׁוֹן,, אֲשֶׁר” – which is one of the forms in which אֵי functions,³ “that,” אֲשֶׁר – for we find the word אֵי functioning in the sense of אֲשֶׁר, “that” or “which,” – as in, “And is there a reason that my spirit not feel constricted?”⁵ – And many instances of אֵי are explained as being of this sense, for example, “that [the number of] his days are fixed.”⁶

Ibn Ezra

The whole community knew. Rather, they “saw” – not that they watched Aaron died, but they saw all the events surrounding his death and understood what had happened.

ויראו כל העדה. כאשר ראו זה
המאורע שאירע בכו שלשים יום

Chizkuni

The entire congregation saw, etc.” since this verse cannot be understood literally, the Jerusalem Targum renders it as meaning that when the people witnessed Moses and Elazar returning without Aaron, they drew the appropriate conclusions, [especially, seeing that Elazar wore the garments of the High Priest, as described in verse 28. Ed.] They observed Moses having ash on his head and having rent his garments, calling out to Elazar, “woe for my brother Aaron!” An alternate interpretation: we find that the expression ראייה, “seeing” is also used to describe “knowing,” i.e. seeing with one’s mental eye. Prominent examples are: Genesis 40,16, where the chief of the bakers is described as “seeing” that Joseph had properly explained the dream of the chief of the cup bearers. Another example of the root: ראה describing “understanding,” rather than seeing with one’s eyes, is found in Genesis 42,1 where our patriarch Yaakov is credited with seeing that there was grain for sale in far off Egypt, i.e. וירא יעקב כי יש שבר במצרים, “Yaakov “saw” that there was trading in grain going on in Egypt.” The author cites more examples.

The Commentators’ Bible: JPS Miqra’ot Gedolot

MaAm Lo’ez

How the people know about Aaron’s death and reacted

“They therefore threatened Moses and Eleazar with stoning unless they produced Aaron. Confounded, in confusion, pain and perplexed, Moses offered a prayer to God, and his prayer was accepted. He commanded the angels to extract the urn of Aaron and place it in the air so that all the Israelites would see it and stop accusing Moses and Eleazar.

When the angels did as commanded and the couch of Aaron was suspended in the air, God passed before it and eulogized him as follows. ...

When the Israelites beheld the eulogy offered by God and the angels, they too began to eulogize him, the young no less than the old, the men as well as the women; and a period of great mourning ensued, lasting thirty days.

The public mourning which followed was never equaled in scope. When Miriam died, only Moses and Aaron mourned for her; and not even for Moses did all the Israelites mourn ...

When Moses beheld Aaron’s couch suspended in mid-air, with God and the angels on all sides mourning for him, he wept. “Woe is me that I have remained alone and isolated! When Miriam died the Israelites did not come to mourn her, but I and Aaron at least performed the last rites for her. Now Aaron has passed away, I and Eleazar render him his due. But who will take care of me when I die? For I am bereft now of father and mother, of brother and sister.”

Whereupon God said to him, “Do not be concerned, for the honor you receive will be greater than theirs. I, Myself, will be at hand to perform the last rites of burial for you. And just as the crypt of Aaron vanished, so will your crypt vanish and no man will know its locations. Moreover, just as the Angel of Death had no power over Aaron, for it was with a kiss from Me that he passed away, so will you die with a kiss.”

Only then was Moses comforted.

MaAm Lo’ez (Torah Anthology) by Rabbi Yitzchok Magriso, translated by Dr. Tzvi Faier, edited with notes by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan

Rashi on Moses’s death – Deuteronomy 34:6

6. ויקבר אתו – HE BURIED HIM. – The Holy One, Blessed is He, in His glory, buried Moses.¹ – רבי ישמעאל אומר – The Tanna Rabbi Ishmael said: [Moses] buried himself. – וזה הוא אחד משלשה אומין – This is one of the three instances of forms of the word which R’ Ishmael would interpret in this way. – כיוצא בו – Likewise, we find, – “On the day his status as a nazir is completed he shall bring him,”² where the clause containing the word אתו, “him,” a form of את, means – הוא מביא את עצמו – he brings himself. – כיוצא בו – Likewise, we find, – “And they will cause them to bear the sin of guilt.”³ – ובי אחרים משיאים אותם – Now, is it others who cause them to bear it? – אלא – Rather, the verse means – הם משיאים את עצמם⁴ – they cause themselves to bear.⁴

Gd buried Moses as even he doesn't know where he is buried

Sotah 13b & 14a

The verse describing the burial of Moses states: “**And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab over against Beth Peor; and no man knows of his grave to this day**” (Deuteronomy 34:6). Rabbi Berekhya says: This verse provides a **sign within a sign**, i.e., a very precise description of the location of his burial, **and even with this** the verse concludes: “**And no man knows of his grave to this day**” (Deuteronomy 34:6).

The Gemara relates: **And the evil monarchy** of the Roman Empire **already sent messengers to**

the garrison [gastera] of Beth Peor and said to them: **Show us where Moses is buried**. As the men **stood above** on the upper section of the mountain, it **appeared to them** as if the grave was **below** in the lower section. As they stood below, it **appeared to them** to be above. **They divided into two groups**, one above and one below. **To those who were standing above**, the grave **appeared to them** to be below; to those who were standing below, the grave **appeared to them** to be above, to fulfill that which is stated: “**And no man knows of his grave to this day**” (Deuteronomy 34:6).

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: Even Moses our teacher himself does not know where he is buried. It is written here: “**And no man knows of his grave,**” and it is written there: “**And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death**” (Deuteronomy 33:1). In other words, even Moses, as he is referred to by the term “man,” does not know his burial place. **And Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, says: For what reason was Moses buried near Beth Peor? In order to atone for the incident that transpired at Beth Peor (Numbers, chapter 25).**

Rashbam

RASHBAM 6 He buried him. Rather, “one buried him,” that is, “he was buried” (OJPS). The same syntax occurs in “Can horses gallop on a rock? Can it be plowed with oxen?” (Amos 6:12), where the Hebrew literally asks, “Can [some unknown] he plow it with oxen?” Since no one knew his burial place, the one who buried him was also unidentified, and the text simply writes that “someone” buried him. [F]

Ibn Ezra

IBN EZRA 6 He buried him. He buried himself by entering a burial cave in the valley. The pronoun is used with this meaning also in “the foremen of the Israelites found *themselves* in trouble” (Exod. 5:19) and “the shepherds tended *themselves* instead of tending the flock” (Ezek. 34:8). In

ויקבר אותו. הוא קבר עצמו שנכנס במערה
בגיא וכן וירעו הרועים אותם ויראו שוטרי בני
ישראל אותם ודע כי הר העברים שהוא הר

Kli Yakar

ולא היה מים לעדה. על צד העונש חסרו המים לפי שלא הספידוה
כראוי, כי במשה ואהרן נאמר ויבכו אותם בני ישראל וכאן לא נאמר ויבכו
אותה ונאמר ותמת שם ותקבר שם, כי במקום שמתה שם תהא קבורתה
לאלתר ונשכחה כמת מלב ולא הרגישו בהעדרה כלל ע"כ נחסרו להם
המים כדי שידעו למפרע שהבאר היה בזכות מרים ורז"ל (מ"ק כח.) אמרו
שנסמכה מיתתה לפר' פרה לומר לך מה הקרבנות מכפרים אף מיתת
הצדיקים מכפרת, ולמה נסמכה דווקא לפרה כי באמת אינה קרבן רק מה
שמצינו שקראה הכתוב חטאת, (במדבר י"ט) אבל העיקר הוא כשם
שהפרה באה לקנח צואת בנה כך הצדקת אם כל חי במיתתה מקנחת
צואת תולדותיה.

The well stopped providing water after
Miriam's death was punishment for the
people not mourning her properly.

Or Hachaim

Why indeed did they not participate in Miriam's eulogy? Or HaChaim explains:

אמר הכתוב — As for *why* they did not show kindness to Miriam by eulogizing her, — וְטַעַם שֶׁלֹא גָמְלוּ חֶסֶד
בְּסִמּוּךְ "וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֶר שָׁם" — the verse says just below, *Miriam died there and she was buried there*,
וְאָמְרוּ בְּגִמְרָא וְזֶה לְשׁוֹנִים — and [the Sages] teach in the Gemara (*Moed Katan* 28a), and this
is a quote: "וַתָּמָת וְגו'" — *[Miriam] died there and was buried there*. This implies
that her burial was soon after her death. — עַד כָּאן — The quote ends here. וְלָטַעַם זֶה לֹא הִרְגִּישׁוּ
לְבֹא לְגִמּוֹל חֶסֶד — It was for this reason that [the people] did not know to show her the kindness

of a eulogy, because by the time they heard about her death, she had already been buried; וּבְמִשְׁךְ זְמַן
— and in the short time that had passed from her burial until
they learned about her death, the torment of thirst sprung upon them, since the well had disappeared
with Miriam's death, and they became too preoccupied to engage in her eulogy. וְהוּא מֵה שְׁאֵמֹר
— This is why immediately after saying, *and she was buried there*, the verse says, *There was no water for the assembly*. It is to teach us that all these things
occurred one right after the other: Miriam's death and immediate burial, the disappearance of the well
and its immediate impact on the people, and the people gathering to complain to Moshe and Aharon.^[6]

Alshich

The entire community of Bnei Yisroel came. The Midrash says that while Moshe and Aharon were busy with the burial of Miriam, they saw a multitude of the Bnei Yisroel coming. Aharon thought they were coming to do kindness with Miriam. However, Moshe told him that if so, they would have come with the elders leading the way, etc.

This teaches that the Bnei Yisroel should have done a kindness for Miriam, especially considering that they drank in the Wilderness in her merit. They realized this immediately upon her death and it was indisputable, for there had been many wells and they lived in Koidesh for many days, and suddenly the water disappeared.

Also, "and [Miriam] was buried there" — implying that there was no trouble for them to bestow kindness by participating in her funeral. Therefore, they were punished by the lack of water.

Rashi

□ כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל — THE ENTIRE HOUSE OF ISRAEL. הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים — The men and the women,
לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה אֶהְרֵן רוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם — for Aaron would pursue peace — וּמָטִיל אֲהֶבָה — and instill love
בֵּין בָּעָלֵי מְרִיבָה — between parties to a quarrel — וּבֵין אִישׁ לְאִשְׁתּוֹ⁴ — and between a man and his
wife.⁴

Rashi on Moses's death – Deuteronomy 34:8

מִתּוֹךְ — But of Aaron, — אָבֵל בְּאֶהְרֵן — The males. — הַזְּכָרִים — THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. — בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.⁸
— and instill peace — וְנוֹתֵן שְׁלוֹם בֵּין אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ — because he would pursue peace — שֶׁהָיָה רוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם
בֵּין אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ — and between a wife³ and her husband,⁴ — וּבֵין אִשָּׁה לְבַעְלָהּ — נֶאֱמַר
— it says, — "The entire House of Israel [wept for him],"⁵ — כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל,⁵ — זְכָרִים וְנָקִיבוֹת⁶ — males
and females.⁶

Rabbeinu Bahya on Bamidbar 20:29

. ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל . "the entire house of Israel wept for the passing of Aaron for thirty days." The expression בית ישראל includes men and women. When the Torah reports the mourning of Moses the word בית is absent, as the Torah writes ויבכו בני ישראל את משה , "the Children of Israel wept for the passing of Moses in the fields of Moav for thirty days" (Deut. 34,8). The difference was that Aaron, in his capacity of striving always to restore harmonious relations between people patched up many marriages. This is why men and women alike wept for his passing (compare Rashi).

Or HaChaim on Deuteronomy 34:8

ויבכו בני ישראל. ובאהרן אמר (במדבר כ כט) כל בית ישראל, רבותינו ז"ל (אדר"נ פרק יב) נתנו טעם לפי שהיה אוהב שלום כו':

ויבכו בני ישראל, The Jewish people wept, etc. When Aaron's death is reported in Numbers 20,29, the Torah wrote that "the whole house of Israel wept for thirty days." Our sages in *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 12 claim that Aaron's having been a lover of peace was the reason why he was mourned even more than Moses when he died.

Rabbi Avraham ben Ezra wrote that the line in Numbers refers to the whole house of Israel weeping in honour of Moses who remained alive. One must not accept his explanation as it is not permissible to change a verse which describes a virtue of the people and to downgrade this virtue by attributing it to a less noble consideration. By doing so Ibn Ezra suggests that when Moses himself died the people did not get unduly upset when he was being eulogised.

Perhaps we may understand the difference in the people's reaction to the two deaths as stemming from the fact that Aaron's death was unexpected whereas they had been informed well in advance that Moses was about to die. The sudden realisation that Aaron had died had a more profound effect on the people. Moses had told the people for six weeks running, during all his exhortations, that he was approaching his death (compare Deut. 4,22). No wonder that they did not react as profoundly at the time Moses was eulogised as at the time Aaron was eulogised.

Another possible reason for the difference in the reported reaction of the people was due to the immediate **visible** effects of Aaron's death such as the disappearance of the protective clouds which had hovered over the encampment of the Israelites ever since the Exodus. Their disappearance had been followed immediately with an attack by the Canaanite as explained in *Taanit* 3. These factors combined to stir the entire nation into weeping at Aaron's death. When Moses died they did not experience such a negative fallout; on the contrary, they knew the way was clear to cross the Jordan and take possession of the land of Canaan.

Still another possibility to explain this relatively muted reaction by the Jewish people to Moses' death was the fact that immediately after Moses died the *Shechinah* settled on Joshua. The people took comfort from this fact. This may be compared to someone who has lost a bag of precious stones, but has found some pearls instead. Although he mourns the loss of the stones, he does not do so with the same intensity as he would have done had he not found the pearls. This is why not all of the people wept at Moses' death. This is also the reason that the report of the people weeping for the death of Moses is followed immediately by the report that Joshua was filled with a spirit of wisdom, etc. When Aaron had died this was equivalent to the loss of diamonds which had not been replaced by other precious stones. Even though Eleazar was appointed as High Priest in his father's stead, they did not weep for the absence of a High Priest but for the loss of something which was irreplaceable, i.e. the benefits Aaron's presence had bestowed upon them.

Tannit 9a

The Gemara raises an objection from a Baraita: Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Yehuda, says: Three good sustainers rose up for the Jewish people during the exodus from Egypt, and they are: Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And three good gifts were given from Heaven through their agency, and these are they: the well of water, the pillar of cloud, and the manna. He elaborates: The well was given to the Jewish people in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud was in the merit of Aaron; and the manna in the merit of Moses. When Miriam died the well disappeared, as it is stated: "And Miriam died there" (Numbers 20:1), and it says thereafter in the next verse: "And there was no water for the congregation" (Numbers 20:2). But the well return in the merit of both Moses and Aaron.

And Aaron died the clouds of glory disappeared, as it is stated: "And the Canaanites, the King of Arad heard" (Numbers 33:40). What report did he hear? He heard that Aaron had died and the clouds of glory had disappeared, and he thought that the Jewish people were no longer protected by Heaven and therefore he had been given permission to go to war against the Jewish people. And this disappearance of the clouds is the meaning of that which is written: "And all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead" (Numbers 20:29).

Rabbi Abbahu said: Do not read the verse as: "And they saw"; rather, read it as: And they were seen, as the clouds which had concealed the Jewish people were temporarily removed. This is as Reish Lakish taught. As Reish Lakish said: the term *ki* actually has at least four distinct meanings: If; perhaps; but; because, or that. According to this interpretation, the verse would be rendered: And all the congregation was seen, because Aaron was dead.

The baraita continues: Both the well and the clouds of glory returned in the merit of Moses. However, when Moses died all of them disappeared. As it is stated: “And I cut off the three shepherds in one month” (Zechariah 11:8). But did the three shepherds really die in one month? Didn’t Miriam die in the month of Nisan, and Aaron in Av and Moses in Adar? Rather this verse teaches us that with the death of Moses the three good gifts that were given through their agency were annulled, and all three gifts disappeared in one month, which made it seem as though all three leaders had died at the same time.

Rashi

2. וְלֹא הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה – THERE WAS NO WATER FOR THE ASSEMBLY. מִכָּאן – From here we see שֶׁכָּל – that the entire forty years that the Israelites spent in the wilderness הָיָה לָהֶם הַבְּאֵר – they had the Well בְּנוּת מִרְיָם – through the merit of Miriam.²

Ibn Ezra – Numbers 20:2

² The community was without water. The notion that a well followed the Israelites around the desert on account of the merit of Miriam is some individual’s midrash. If such a miracle occurred, why is it not mentioned in the Torah? Instead, we are told plainly, “He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink as if from the great deep” (Ps. 78:15). The inventor of the midrash based himself on the juxtaposition of vv. 1 and 2, but this is no proof; these are two separate events that happened at the same place. If he disagrees, let him tell us who died at Rephidim, where “there was no water for the people to drink” (17:1)! So the community being without water has nothing to do with Miriam’s death. But it does have to do with the deaths of

ולא היה מים לעדה. ספר הכתוב
שנים מאורעים האחד מות מרים והשני
מות אהרן ומשה ולא יכנסו לארץ
והחל לספר הסבה

Moses and Aaron before they could enter the land. The text will now tell us why and how that happened.

Class outline

- Timing of Miriam & Aaron’s death
 - Normal or natural
 - Punishment – individual or collective
 - Atonement - individual or collective
 - Necessary change from mentality of Egypt
- Deaths - How were Miriam & Aaron’s deaths described
- Mourned - how were Miriam & Aaron mourned
- Consequences of Miriam & Aaron’s death and why
- Legacy of Miriam & Aaron – difference between prophets, priest, & kings/leaders